

Evaluating Print Resources

In addition to the criteria for evaluating reference sources in any format, there are specific criteria to keep in mind when evaluating print resources – which include:

1. **Scope.** What does the book cover and in how much detail? How complete is it? Are there noticeable omissions? The title should indicate the purpose, while the introduction or preface will explain what the book is intended to accomplish. The table of contents or index lists the subjects that are included.

For example, *Gale Directory of Publications and Broadcast Media* is a five-volume set that lists, as a part of the subtitle, “newspapers, magazines, journals, radio and television stations, and cable systems.” An examination of the table of contents shows that the first two volumes list publications and broadcast media alphabetically by state, then Canadian province, and within state or province, by city. Subsequent volumes include a variety of subject indexes and international information. This is not a directory of international academic and research journals.

The scope of the one-volume *All-In-One Directory* from Gebbie Press is similar, but is on a modified scale and includes only United States media. Three color-coded sections organize the book in such a way that multiple indexes are not necessary.

Ulrich’s Periodicals Directory is international in scope. The subtitle indicates the inclusion of “irregular serials & annuals.” The first three volumes list all serials alphabetically by subject, and under each subject, by title. The vast majority of entries are for scholarly journals, although general interest periodicals are included. Volumes four and five contain multiple indexes and entries for U.S. newspapers.

2. **Clarity.** Is the material well-organized and easily understood? Is the text arranged in a logical sequence, either alphabetically or chronologically? For example, all dictionary and nearly all encyclopedia entries are organized alphabetically for easy access. The *World Almanac and Book of Facts* includes a “chronology of events” reported month by month for the previous year. The *Idaho Blue Book* contains an “Idaho History Chronicle,” with notable events for each time period or year, from prehistory, through territorial days, up to the present day. Note that any world atlas (such as *National Geographic Atlas of the World*) is arranged geographically, usually by continent and region.

3. **Index and Cross-References.** How complete is the index? Some reference sources provide a variety of access points; for example, the *TIME Almanac* has three indexes: a keyword index, a section (subject) index, and a comprehensive index.

Do cross-references lead to related subjects and similar concepts? Are "See" and "See also" references used in the index or throughout the book? "See" and "See also" notations are cross-references that lead you to the correct or additional headings. You will find them in library catalogs, encyclopedias, and a variety of indexes, such as the H. W. Wilson family of indexes and the Yellow Pages of your telephone book.

An index can refer to page numbers (*World Almanac*), entry numbers (*Encyclopedia of Associations*), or table numbers (*Statistical Abstract of the United States*).

The *Encyclopedia of Associations*, a multi-volume guide to more than 22,000 U.S. and international organizations, is arranged by broad subject and subheading, then alphabetically by name of organization. The index to this set is organized alphabetically by organization names and keywords – identifiable by their boldface type. The numbers in the index refer to entry numbers, not page numbers.

4. **Special Features.** Does the book contain extras that add significantly to its value? For example, the *American Heritage Dictionary*, like many dictionaries, includes grammar and punctuation rules, foreign alphabet tables, a gazetteer (list of geographic names), weights and measures, and photos and sketches. Additional features might include maps, diagrams, charts, and a glossary.

Are the illustrative materials located near the pages which describe or refer to them? In the case of the *American Heritage Dictionary*, pictures are in the margins of the text, right beside the corresponding entries.

5. **Format.** Do the size, quality of paper, and binding make for a sturdy book that is easily handled? The two general-purpose almanacs, *TIME Almanac* and *World Almanac*, are available in both paperback and hardback editions. If your patrons use these heavily, you will want to purchase them in hardback, if possible, for greater durability.

The margins should be wide, the pages should lie flat for easy copying, and the print should be clear and large enough. Two reference books that are difficult to photocopy because of the narrow gutter (margin next to the binding) are the *Physicians' Desk Reference (PDR)* and the *Idaho Business-to-Business Sales & Marketing Directory*. In addition, these books have oversized pages and small print, both of which will make producing a good copy more difficult. In the case of the *PDR*, there are other choices for information about drugs that would be easier to photocopy. However, there is no print equivalent to the *Idaho Business-to-Business Sales & Marketing Directory*. While photocopying may be an issue, you will not want to avoid a book only for this reason, if the information is important for your library.